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The Iowa Review

Volume 40
Issue 1 *Spring*

Article 45

2010

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Recommended Citation

Pierce, Todd James. "Black On White: A Found Poem." *The Iowa Review* 40.1 (2010): 194-195. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6872>

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BLACK ON WHITE: A FOUND POEM

TODD JAMES PIERCE

In 2007, I asked hundreds of students at traditionally black colleges to help me better understand common social stereotypes of white people in the African-American community.

White people tend to ask a lot of questions,
want more than they need, take a lot
of vacations because they have more money
than most everyone I know. White people
get away with stuff I would never try,
are unafraid, don't understand
that they can make it in any city
they might like to live. White people
act like race isn't an issue
anymore, like racism doesn't exist.
White people can trace their ancestors
a dozen generations back.
White people act extra friendly, smile
a lot. White people behave
like the modern-day effects
of slavery aren't a good reason
for me to be upset right now. White
people believe that history is
the history of white people
as that is what they learned in school.
White people talk about spirituality only
on Sunday, if at all. White people are good
in groups, good at business, good at reaching
out to others. If I were to change
one thing about white people,
it would be this: for them to realize
how few nonwhite friends

most of them have, how hard
it is to live in a world where
people see you as a possible criminal,
that they will never find out who they are
by asking questions
about how black people see them
as a group. Or maybe this,
for them to understand that to be black
is to have two sets of eyes,
one looking to see
what your black friends think
of you,
the other fixed
on white people quietly judging you
from the far side of the room.